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SUBJECT: Japanese Leaders' Statements on WTO Ministerial
Postponement

¶1. The Japanese media covered statements by Japanese leaders made December 15 concerning the recent decision by WTO Director General Pascal Lamy to postpone a ministerial level meeting in Geneva many had suspected would take place this week. Minister for Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI) Nikai said he is disappointed WTO member economies will miss the opportunity this year to establish modalities for agriculture and non-agricultural market access (NAMA). Major dailies Yomiuri and Nikkei both ran inside-page reports on Prime Minister Aso's remarks, which he posted on the PM's Official Residence Home Page, that called the decision to postpone the ministerial "regrettable." Prime Minister Aso suggested Japan will continue "patient negotiations to reach an early agreement." Provided below is Minister Nikai's statement and the Embassy's English translation of PM Aso's comments:

¶2. Begin text:

Statement by Minister Toshihiro Nikai - December 15, 2008.
Toshihiro Nikai, Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, Japan.

WTO Director General Pascal Lamy recommended on December 12th that the proposed Ministerial Meeting on the Doha Round negotiations should not be held this year; 48 hours have elapsed since then, and it has become clear that this will be the case. We are disappointed to lose the final opportunity to establish modalities for Agriculture and NAMA this year.

We will continue our efforts to ensure that the Ministerial can be held as early as possible.

Under the present economic and financial circumstances, the importance of maintaining and strengthening a free and open trade system has increased further.

Japan remains fully committed to achieving an early conclusion of the Doha Round in close cooperation with fellow WTO members. Further progress needs to be made, not only in Agriculture and NAMA, where revised Chairs' texts have been issued, but also in other negotiating areas such as Rules and Services. In particular, we call for a new text for Rules to be issued as early as possible.

We also call on all governments to join us in continuing efforts to restrain protectionism, in particular by undertaking in good faith the commitments made at the Summit on Financial Markets and the World Economy and the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting not to raise new barriers to investment or to trade for the next 12 months.

End text.

¶3. Begin text:

Prime Minister Aso's comment on WTO Doha Round - December 15, 2008

In the Summit on Financial Markets and the World Economy and the APEC Summit held earlier, strong statements were issued regarding the WTO Doha Round trade talks. Despite these statements, a ministerial meeting has been put off and a modalities agreement is unlikely to be reached by the end of this year. That is regrettable.

Given the current serious economic situation, it is necessary to grow the global economy through expanded trade. Our nation will continue to persistently make efforts to bring about an agreement in the Doha Round at an early date. In the agricultural sector, on which various discussions were conducted in past negotiations, Japan will continue to strengthen its domestic industry.

In an effort to resist moves for protectionism, our nation is determined to strongly call on the WTO member nations at its meetings to refrain from introducing new barriers in the trade and investment areas, including export restrictions.

End text.

SCHIEFFER